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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
31 October 1966

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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HIGHLIGHTS

There was no significant military action reported in South Vietnam. In North Vietnam, a na-

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I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: No contact has been reported with Communist forces by the 29 battalion-size or larger allied operations presently being conducted in South Vietnam (Para. 1). Australian forces have been attempting to locate and capture Viet Cong communications complexes

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Constituent Assembly deputies formed official blocs and selected the constitution drafting committee on 31 October (Paras. 1-5). The Unified Buddhist Association may call another special congress in an attempt to resolve its leadership problems (Para. 6). Premier Ky will soon attempt to reassure labor leader Tran Quoc Buu, who fears that police director Loan is planning to take action against him (Paras. 7-8).

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Allied forces are continuing to press 29 battalion size or larger search-and-destroy operations against Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army units in widespread sections of South Vietnam. No contact with enemy forces has been reported during the past 24 hours, however.

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2. The 1st Australian Task Force is making a special effort to capture Viet Cong radio equipment, operators, and associated documents.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Constituent Assembly Developments

1. The Constituent Assembly's morning session on 31 October was devoted to the formation of "blocs" or voting groups and the selection of the constitution drafting committee.

2. The largest of the four established blocs is the Peoples Bloc, with 44 deputies mostly native to north and central Vietnam. Dai Viet Party, military, and Catholic deputies also participate in this bloc. The Alliance Bloc, with 25 members, is primarily southern based with a core of Hoa Hao members led by Le Phuoc Sang. The Democratic Bloc has 16 members and is almost entirely Catholic, with northern Catholics likely to predominate. The final group is the Movement for the Renaissance of the South. Its 12 or 13 members represent a slightly more militant group of southern regionalists. Some 19 or 20 deputies who chose to remain independent include Phan Quang Dan, La Thanh Nghe, Tran Van Van, and Nguyen Van Hoi.

3. During the election of permanent assembly officers last week, the deputies who now constitute the Peoples and Democratic blocs cooperated to a considerable extent. With perfect voting discipline, these two blocs constitute a majority of the assembly (60 of 117). With only a few defections from this coalition on any given issue, however, the independents could exercise the balance of power, assuming that the two southern blocs would also tend to vote together.

4. Initially at least, government influence does not appear to be concentrated in any one bloc. The heavy concentration of northerners and military men in the Peoples Bloc suggest that many of these deputies would be relatively sympathetic to the interests of the current government. In addition, there have been several reports that I Corps commander General Lam has been working closely with the Dai Viet members of this bloc. At the same time,

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however, Le Phuoc Sang, the leader of the southern-based Alliance Bloc is also reported to be a close associate of Premier Ky.

5. The chairman of the constitution drafting committee was to be chosen on 31 October at the assembly's afternoon session. The 40-man committee is made up of 15 members of the Peoples Bloc, nine members of the Alliance Bloc, six members of the Democratic Bloc, four Southern Renaissance members, and six independents. The Alliance Bloc and the Southern Renaissance group will probably agree to support Pham Dinh Hung for chairman. The Peoples Bloc and the Democratic Bloc may support either Nguyen Huu Thong or Dinh Thanh Chau.

Buddhist Affairs

6. According to Vietnamese press reports, the Unified Buddhist Association's supreme patriarch has called for another congress to try to mend the split in the UBA leadership. The last UBA congress, which met on 21-22 October, only accentuated the rift between militant and moderate Buddhists.

Premier Ky to Reassure Vietnamese Labor Leader

7. Tran Quoc Buu, president of the Vietnamese Labor Confederation (CVT), is scheduled to see Premier Ky soon in order to set the basis for continuing cooperation between the government and the CVT. Last week, Buu went into hiding for several days, fearing that police director Loan was about to take action against him. He returned to his residence after being contacted by the government's labor minister but said that the CVT must remain on guard against General Loan, regardless of any assurances from Premier Ky.

8. Buu, who heads the country's largest labor group, apparently went into hiding on the basis of secret information concerning a plot against him which allegedly involves Loan and a rival Saigon labor leader. Earlier, Buu had been quoted in the Western press--apparently without his consent--as having expressed concern about the emergence of a police state in Vietnam, and this evidently added to his fears of retaliatory action by Loan.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS:

There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS:

There is nothing of significance to report.

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